

THE MISTLETOE MAID



THE Spirit of the Mistletoe Her spell about the land throws wide. And eyes are bright and cheeks aglow Where stirs the pulse of Christmaside

O gracious branch with berries pearled. Whose magic sways the whole wide world. The rhythmic sweetness of a kiss? Yet as the winter, weeping, dies The charm still matters Cupid, so When'er he looks in Psyche's eyes He sees the mirrored mistletoe.

A CHRISTMAS A LA MODE.

It was Rose Marie who, marking the day of my last visit on the calendar, made the discovery that I was to belong to father on Christmas day. This may sound a bit confusing, for most little girls belong equally to their parents, but I, Willette Warrington, don't. Ever since I can remember mother has lived in our nice apartment in Central Park West, and father has lived down in the Fifties, just off the avenue. And I belong to mother year in and year out, excepting three days in each month, and for these three days I belong to father. When Rose Marie made the discovery that my next visit to fifty-something street would fall upon the 25th of December she was quite ready to cry her little black eyes out. Father sent the brougham on the morning of the 24th. "Billie, Billie, dear!" cried mother, clasping me tightly in her arms when she caught sight of the carriage which was to take me away. "Don't you want me to go, mother?" I asked a little unsteadily. "Want you to go?" she cried. Then she hesitated and added, very calm and self-possessed: "Of course I always want you with me, Billie, dear, but then so does your father want you, and for the next three days you belong to him. So I want you to go."

Wine no selected mine. "Now," I said, as we came out of the department store, "I want to buy mother's gift." "Why, of course," said father hurriedly. "What do you want? Where do you want to go? I'll tell the cabby."



"Oh, mother," I shouted, whatever you think your mother will like I know she will appreciate it all the more if you select it yourself." He put me in the hansom and, jumping in himself, told the man to drive slowly up the avenue. This would give me time to decide upon the present and where it should be purchased. I was wavering between a set of silver for her Antoinette desk and a pair of green malacca jars for her favorite dwarf plines when our hansom was rained in a block. Directly abreast of our hansom was another one, ours going north, our neighbor's coming south, and as I turned my head I looked straight into mother's eyes. She was the sole occupant of the south coming cab. "Mother!" I shouted. "Oh, mother, mother!" "Billie!" she cried. We had both seen each other together, just as we always see everything together. "What is the trouble?" began father when he, too, turned his head and looked into mother's lovely eyes. "How-de-do, Will!" she said softly. I saw father clench his hands tightly, then, "How-de-do, Nell!" he returned. "A awful block, isn't it?" "Oh, very bad!" said mother, but she was looking at me sitting so proudly at father's side, and presently I caught the suspicion of a tear in her eyes. Directly a big lump came in my throat. I saw how it was. Mother was thinking of Christmas and of her little girl, and I was sorry, sorry for her and for father too. The surface cars banged their bells, the policemen shouted and the cabbies swore. And all the while our hansom was jammed tightly next to mother's, and we sat staring straight at each other and saying not a word. Just then a policeman came up to mother's hansom and shouted to the driver of another carriage in such a way as to render it unsafe to pull out. The policeman, who of course knew nothing of our affairs, said: "Step across into the hansom next to

you, m'am. its wheels are safe, and I'm thinking the line will be moving north first." Poor mother flushed cruelly and said not a word, but just as there looking with pleading eyes at father. But father didn't move, and neither did he speak, so I took the situation in my two small hands and said: "Father, won't you help mother into our cab?" Directly I spoke to father he was all attention and politeness. He stood up and held out his hand to mother and carefully helped her across into our hansom. I believe mother would never have come only she knew that a great many persons had heard me and were watching us, and so she yielded gracefully, as mother alone can. When she was in our cab and sitting down with me squeezed in between father and herself, she raised her eyes and said quietly: "Thank you, Will." A moment later the line started, slowly moving northward, and our hansom went with the others, father and mother and I were sitting side by side. It seemed so good just to think of it, although I knew it all came of an accident alone. After we had gone two blocks uptown, father spoke—very quietly and with tightly pressed lips. "I'll speak to the man and tell him to stop at the next corner. Then I'll get out and you and Billie can have the cab to yourselves." "There is no need for you to get out, Will," mother told him quickly. "It is I who am the intruder. Have him stop, please, and I will find another hansom."

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